



SE FP Comment
 HD **A crafty G8; The G8 has strengthened unity within itself, and shifted climate change pressure on to its competitors**
 BY Benny Peiser
 CR Financial Post
 WC 963 words
 PD 11 July 2008
 SN National Post
 SC FINP
 ED National
 PG FP11
 LA English
 CY (c) 2008 National Post . All Rights Reserved.

LP

The G8 summit on climate policy, and its categorical rejection by China, India and the other Group of Five developing countries has reinforced the post-Kyoto standoff. Rather than breaking the climate deadlock, as Tony Blair had advocated in the run-up to the Hokkaido summit, the G8 agreement has deepened the existing gulf within the international community with no sign in sight of a possible solution.

It seems increasingly unlikely that the fundamental conflict between the developed nations and the emerging economies of the developing world about collective climate targets can be resolved anytime soon. The time has come for policy makers around the world to ponder whether a new global climate agreement no longer based on mandatory and legally binding emissions targets is a viable compromise.

TD

In the interminable game of climate poker that is the post-Kyoto negotiation circuit, this year's G8 summit in Japan has pulled off a remarkable feat. Instead of the customary wrangle between Europe and the U. S., a unified West submitted a strategic challenge to the rest of the world. In one of the shrewdest gambits of international climate diplomacy, the leaders of the Western world offered steep emissions cuts -- under the condition that China, India and other developing countries take part in the global effort.

Predictably, China, India and other major economies fear that the G8's crafty climate strategy is backing them into a precarious corner. Reiterating their position that it was the responsibility of rich nations to cut CO2 emissions, they emphasized that poor and developing nations had no option but to reject any proposal that would inevitably undermine the economic growth that is necessary to pull hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.

Nevertheless, by conditioning their offer on the concrete and verifiable participation of developing nations, the Group of Eight has strengthened accord and unity within itself. At the same time, it is further shifting the weight of international pressure and expectation on to its economic rivals and competitors from the developing world.

One of the most notable achievements of the G8's new climate strategy is the fact that the U. S., Europe, Japan and Russia appear to be singing from the same hymn sheet. The EU and Russia are now supporting President Bush's persistent demand that any new climate deal include China and India. By bringing Europe on board a united platform, the G8 has managed to divide the green movement, which is rapidly losing its

traditional allies within European governments. Western governments have thus begun to unshackle their post-Kyoto policy-making from the influence and public pressure of environmental campaign groups.

The change in the climate of opinion can perhaps best be detected in European and North American media reporting. Much of the news outlets favourably welcomed the G8 agreement. Its rejection by China and India, however, was often portrayed as a major obstacle for future progress. In contrast, the habitual objections by environmental campaigners and climate scientists looked rather trivial if not out of tune. In its strategic realignment, the G8 has been aided, if not forced, by a significant economic downturn that is gradually changing the world of international climate policy. A mighty storm is brewing, taking aim at fragile policies that were developed during much better times. In its wake, it is overturning green policies as fresh pressures and new priorities emerge that are significantly shifting political agendas and voter behaviour.

Climate policies and green taxes that were considered trendy only a few years ago, have turned into major liabilities for many governments -- so much so that approval ratings of environmental schemes and policies have begun to dive. Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Australian PM Kevin Rudd are both struggling to fend off growing revolts over green taxes and carbon trading schemes that are driving away Labour's core voters and threaten to bring down their governments. Both centre-left leaders are under mounting pressure to delay or scrap altogether some of their most costly climate policies.

There is now growing concern among environmental campaigners that the momentum for radical climate policies may have been lost, at least for the foreseeable future, if not for good. These fears are fully justified. In the absence of sustained temperature rises and in light of deepening economic problems, the green enthusiasm of Western governments and opposition parties appears to have been suspended, at least for the time being. After years of heating up precariously, the issue of climate change seems destined for a gradual but manifest cooling-off period.

As long as global temperatures remain flat (or even go into reverse), governments and policy makers will increasingly regard costly climate policies as economic risks and political millstones that should be evaded as much as possible - both at national and international levels. Accordingly, it is no longer in the interest of European and other G8 governments to endorse a new climate deal that would further burden their struggling economies unilaterally.

Given the economic crisis and stagnant temperatures, and in view of the intractable climate deadlock, it seems prudent to ponder alternatives to a Kyoto-style treaty. A first step in this direction would be an acknowledgement that such an accord is now extremely unlikely to be attainable at next year's UN climate conference in Copenhagen. What is more, governments would be well advised to prepare the public for a global climate agreement devoid of mandatory targets that have become emissions impossible. - Benny Peiser is the editor of the science policy network CCNet.

ART Black & White Photo: Kimimasa Mayamaki-Pool, Getty Images / (See hardcopy for Photo Description) ;
IN i1 : Energy
NS gclim : Climate Change | genv : Environmental News | ccat : Corporate/Industrial News | gqual :
Air/Water/Land Quality | gwea : Weather | gcat : Political/General News | gglobe : Global/World Issues
RE cana : Canada | namz : North America
IPD Business
PUB National Post
AN Document FINP000020080711e47b0001o